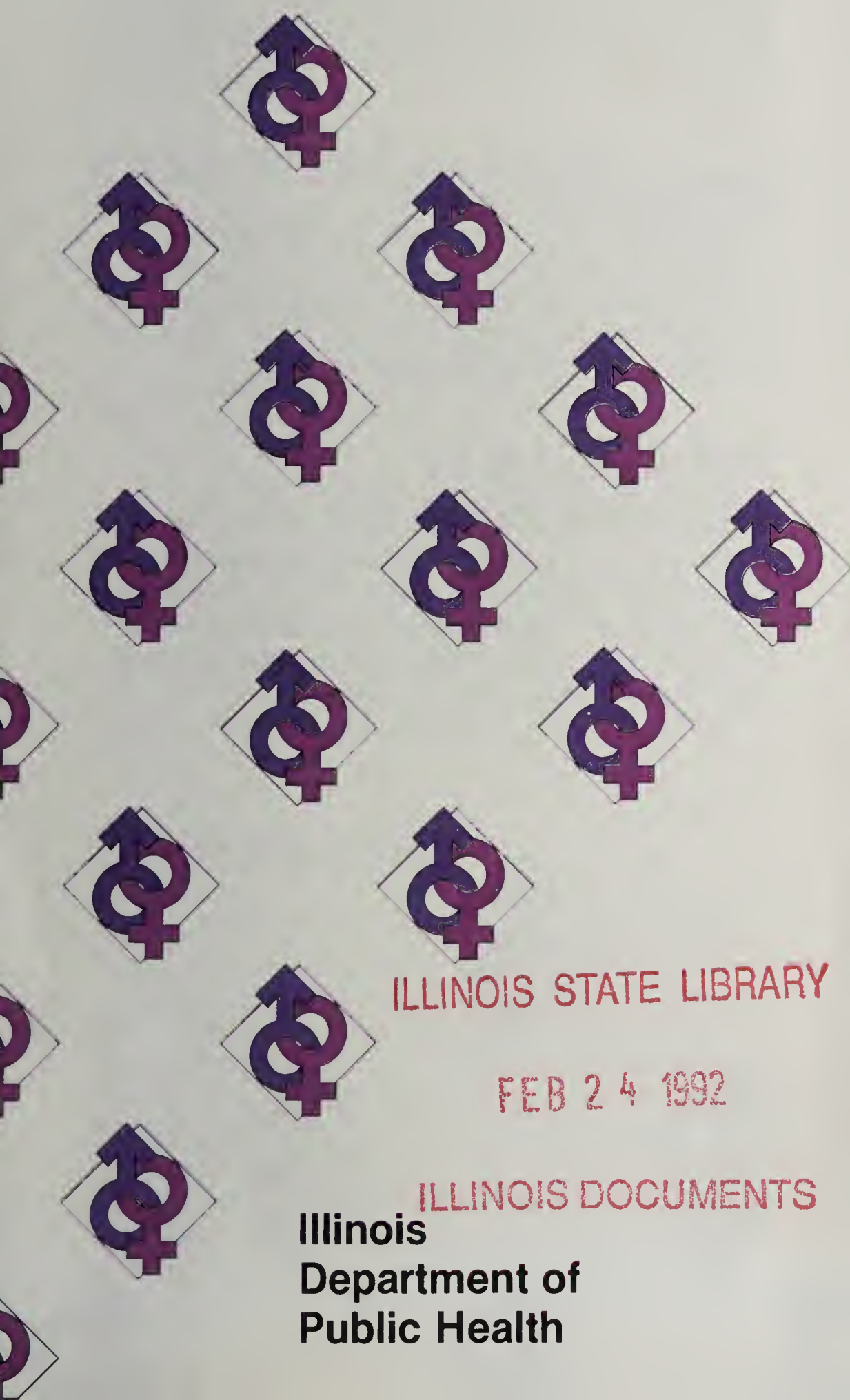


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GETTING MARRIED?

KNOW THE FACTS ABOUT YOUR SEXUAL HEALTH



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**Illinois
Department of
Public Health**

As you set out on your lives together, this is a good time to think about your health, the health of your intended husband or wife and the well-being of your future family. Seeing your doctor for a check-up would be a smart move.

This is the time to assess your risk of diseases spread through sexual activity, including AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as syphilis.

Preventing the spread of AIDS or STDs requires a personal commitment from each of us. That means learning about the causes of AIDS and STDs, and how to prevent their spread. It means recognizing if you have practiced risky behaviors. It means deciding what measures you should take to protect your future wife or husband. This commitment becomes even more crucial if you're thinking about having children.

Couples who have been and remain sexually faithful, and who don't inject illegal drugs, are not likely to get AIDS or STDs. Remember, however, that many people who have the AIDS virus or STDs because of past activity don't know they are infected. That's why it's important that you and your partner — before you get married — talk frankly about your medical, sexual and social experiences.

Couples also should consider their family genetic history because many conditions and diseases are inherited. Because genetic disorders can be transmitted from parents to their children, it is a good idea to be aware of the risks you as a couple may have before getting married or starting a family.

All of these issues are so important, in fact, that Illinois law requires this brochure to be distributed to all persons applying for marriage licenses.

We urge you to read this information, think about it and discuss it with your future spouse. If you have additional questions, consult your physician or local health department. Or, call the State of Illinois telephone hotlines listed in this brochure.

Take the time *now* to think about these important issues: it may save you from heartbreak *later*.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. It's a disease caused by a virus called "HIV" (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) that weakens the body's immune system. The immune system is what helps you fight off infections and disease. If you have been infected with the AIDS virus your immune system can't defend against some kinds of cancers and other illnesses. There's no vaccine or cure for AIDS right now. It's fatal.

HOW DOES SOMEONE GET THE AIDS VIRUS?

The AIDS virus is hard to catch. However, both men and women can get the virus and pass it to someone else in several ways:

- By having sexual intercourse with someone infected with the virus. The highest concentrations of the virus are found in the semen, blood and vaginal secretions of infected persons and can be passed during unprotected sexual intercourse — anal, vaginal or oral.
- By sharing needles for injecting drugs with someone who has the virus. During the course of injecting, or "shooting up," illegal drugs, some people share their needles. In doing so, they also share small amounts of blood. If that blood is HIV infected, the next users of the syringe may be injecting the virus directly into their bloodstream.
- From an infected mother to her children either before or during birth. An infected man can spread the virus to his wife and she can pass it to their unborn baby, or the woman can come into the marriage infected and spread it to both her husband and her baby. This can happen while the baby is inside its mother, during the birthing process or while breastfeeding. If a woman has shared intravenous needles or has had sex with a partner whose sexual history is unknown, she should consult a doctor or health professional before becoming pregnant.
- By receiving a blood transfusion or blood products infected with the AIDS virus. There is little chance of getting it this way anymore, because since 1985 donated blood and blood products have been screened for the virus. Persons receiving a blood transfusion between 1977 and 1985, however, may have unknowingly been given contaminated blood.

AM I AT RISK?

The virus that causes AIDS is spread through certain risky behaviors. Those at greatest risk are:

- Men who have sex with other men.
- People who have many sex partners or who don't know their partner's sexual history.
- People who share needles when injecting illegal drugs.
- Sex partners of persons who practice or have practiced the above behaviors.

If you're one of these people you may be infected and not know it. You can appear healthy and still spread the virus to your partner and to your unborn children.

SHOULD I GET AN AIDS VIRUS TEST?

No tests are required to obtain a marriage license. However, if you have any reason to think you are at risk, don't take chances: you should be tested to see if you have been infected with the AIDS virus. This test can be performed by any licensed physician or at any of the state-funded HIV antibody counseling and testing centers. At these centers, counseling and testing are provided anonymously and free of charge. For the location of the center nearest you, or additional information about AIDS, call the State of Illinois toll-free AIDS hotline, at 1-800-AID-AIDS.

WHAT IF I TEST POSITIVE FOR THE AIDS VIRUS?

A confirmed positive test means you have been infected with the virus that causes AIDS. A positive test does not necessarily mean you will develop AIDS, although many people with positive antibody tests do develop AIDS. AIDS is a fatal disease, but new medical treatments for HIV infected people can help delay the onset or progress of AIDS. *People infected with the AIDS virus remain infected — and infectious — for the rest of*

their lives. A person who tests positive may still get married, although care must be taken to prevent infecting that person's sex partner. A decision on whether to go ahead with marriage after a positive test is a personal one that should be made after talking with one's partner, health care professionals, clergy, counselors and others.

HOW CAN I AVOID GETTING AIDS?

The best way to prevent AIDS is to have sex only with one, mutually faithful uninfected partner, and not to inject drugs. The proper use of condoms — ones made of latex rubber, not lambskin — though not completely safe — can reduce the risk of spreading the AIDS virus through sex.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

In addition to getting the facts about AIDS, people getting married should know about other sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs. As many as 12 million Americans a year contract STDs other than AIDS. People of any race or religion; or social, marital or economic status, can get an STD.

If either person entering into marriage has an STD, the disease can be spread to the other partner and to any children the couple may have. Sexually transmitted diseases, also called “venereal disease” or “VD,” can infect your blood system and sexual organs. There are many STDs. Some of the most common are syphilis, gonorrhea (“clap”), hepatitis, chlamydia, herpes and genital warts.

HOW ARE STDs SPREAD?

All STDs can be passed through sexual intercourse, and some can also be transmitted through other forms of close body contact. Some can also be passed from pregnant women to their babies, or, by sharing needles in drug use. A person can have an STD without any signs or symptoms. Sometimes the symptoms go away on their own, but the infection is still there until it's treated. Symptoms of these diseases include sores or blisters in the areas of the genitals, mouth or anus . . . rashes . . . or discharges from the genitals or



anus. If you have direct contact with these infectious areas through any kind of intimate contact, such as intercourse, you can become infected.

HOW CAN I REDUCE THE RISK OF GETTING AN STD?

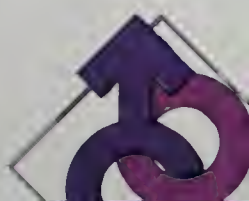
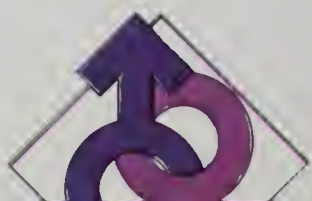
The risk of STD infection increases dramatically in relation to the number of sex partners. Having sexual contact with only one person, who also is sexually faithful, greatly reduces the chances of becoming infected. Avoid having sex if you see any suspicious sores, rashes or discharges from the genitals. Ask your partner about them. Using a condom — one made of latex rubber, not lamb-skin — is one of the best preventive measures against STDs.

HOW ARE STDs TREATED?

Some STDs, such as gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis, can be cured with medicine and proper medical care. Others, such as hepatitis, herpes and genital warts, are difficult to cure. STDs don't just go away, and they can damage your body.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I MIGHT HAVE AN STD?

If you have any reason to suspect you may have an STD, immediately consult your doctor, local health department or call the Illinois Department Public Health's toll-free STD help line, at 1-800-252-8989. Your call will always be kept confidential.



A WORD ABOUT GENETIC DISORDERS

An estimated 10 percent of the U.S. population suffers from a condition that is inherited, or caused by genetic factors. Some of these are obvious, like cleft lip and palate, and can be passed on from generation to generation. In other cases, such as cystic fibrosis or sickle cell anemia, the man or woman may carry the genetic material for the disorder, even though it is not apparent. Before getting married, couples should be familiar with their own genetic background and their chances for having a child with such a condition.

Genetic conditions can be mild with no serious health consequences, such as color blindness, or severe and life-threatening as in the case of muscular dystrophy. Some of the more common genetic diseases include cleft lip and palate, congenital heart defects, cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, Rh disease, sickle cell anemia and Tay Sachs disease. Inherited diseases have different characteristics, treatments and life expectancies.

Those who might benefit from genetic counseling after reviewing their family health history include:

- People from families with a history of birth defects, blindness, mental retardation, deafness, seizures, disorders of growth and development, and known genetic disorders.
- Individuals who are members of certain ethnic groups that have a higher risk of specific genetic disorders.
- Women 35 years or older.
- Couples who are blood relatives.
- People of reproductive age who have been exposed to environmental hazards.

If you and your partner plan to have children and have any reason to be concerned about genetic diseases, talk to your physician, local health department or call the Illinois Department of Public Health's Genetic Diseases Program at 217-785-4522.

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